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ABSTRACT

Multicultural education, anti-racist education, and conflict resolution are curriculum-based approaches to reducing racial conflict. Since the 1930s, attempts have been made to develop curricula to change negative racial attitudes and encourage appreciation for people of all races. In the 1980s, multicultural education has focused on the unique qualities and the mutual interdependence of minority and majority groups within a society and of various communitites within the world system. However, some critics have suggested that education labelled "multicultural" evades the issue of racism by diverting attention to milder topics. Some studies demonstrate the limited effectiveness of multicultural programs and the fact that some school districts without minority group students do not promote the discussion of racial or ethnic differences. Anti-racist education and conflict resolution address racism by allowing teachers and students to analyze the inequalities in power and economic status that determine race relations. The following recommendations for evaluating and reforming curricula and school policy are suggested: (1) issue policy statements that cover broad school district philosophy, hiring practices, and the handling of bias-motivated incidents; (2) maintain racial and cultural diversity among school personnel; (3) provide services for victims of bias-motivated violence; (4) report and monitor trends in racial attitudes; (5) establish school-wide committees on human relations; (6) use the arts to encourage critical thinking about social issues; (7) check textbooks and other resources for bias; (8) reflect the cultural diversity of the school in teaching strategies; and (9) affirm racial and cultural differences with regular and special activities. A list of 16 references and six resources are appended. (FMW)

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CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION TO REDUCE RACIAL CONFLICT

The potential for racial conflict always exists in our multicultural society, and periodically there are widespread and serious racial incidents. Although various social institutions have attempted to respond to racial prejudice, effective interventions have not been devised to eliminate outbreaks of racial conflict totally or to obliterate the causes of racism. Public support for overt racism such as segregation and claims of racial inferiority have declined, but more subtle forms have emerged. Retrenchment in areas such as affirmative action and government programs to help decrease the economic and social power differentials among the races could be a cause (Kinder, 1986; Survey Research Center, 1986).

Educational institutions have always attempted to redress racial conflict and its underlying themes of bias, prejudice, and injustice. Measures have included efforts to change the structural aspects of schools and school districts with plans such as busing or redrawing district lines. As these reforms became controversial, other areas of the education system were targeted for change. Many school systems sought to hire more members of minority groups. Another area of effort has been use of curriculum to develop a climate for racial equality. Three such approaches to curriculum, discussed below, are *multicultural education*, *anti-racist education*, and *conflict resolution*. Although some effective programs use only one of these approaches, the most comprehensive programs include components of all three.

Multicultural Education

Since the 1930s attempts have been made to develop curricula to change negative racial attitudes and encourage appreciation for people of all races. Later efforts stressed the psychological aspects of prejudice reduction and advocated an assimilation model of incorporating racial minorities into the mainstream (Benedict & Ellis, 1942; Lynch, 1987; Olneck, 1990). Later approaches and policies attempted to raise the self-esteem of minorities and to improve their access to good schooling (Grant, 1988).

In the 1980s a more global focus evolved in educational thinking. There were attempts to replace tensions in schools with respect and acceptance through multicultural education, and educating for peace and justice. Curriculum manuals from organizations like the Institute for Peace and Justice (McGinnis, 1984) focus on the unique qualities and the mutual interdependence of minority and majority groups within a society, and of various communities within the world system.

As concern about various types of biases increased, guidelines and checklists (see, for example, Banks, 1984; Ferguson,1987; and Cotera, n.d.) came into use for selecting and evaluating curricula and materials. All 50 states have devised selection criteria for screening materials already in use and for selecting new curricula.

An approach stressing the appreciation of differences has been used by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith in its curriculum materials, a module of 20 activities for elementary school students, *The Wonderful World of Difference*. In response to an increasing community wide need, ADL's program was expanded to *A World of Difference*, a comprehensive campaign against prejudice. It includes curriculum materials and public relations strategies organized by schools, the media, and community groups to celebrate the differences among people and to further the cause of human rights.

Another example is Project REACH, developed in Reston, VA. This intervention consists of materials and dramatic activities aimed at schools with few minority students. It has been successful in creating positive awareness of minorities by teaching human awareness skills (Lynch, 1987).

While curriculum related to culture has been stressed in the past decade, some researchers and practitioners (Brandt, 1986; Milner, 1983; Moultry, 1988) have suggested that education labelled "multicultural" evades the explicit issue of racism by diverting attention to milder topics like differences in cultural heritage and social values. Thus the more relevant, although uncomfortable, topics are avoided by instruction which advocates the relativistic viewpoint that all cultural practices in their native environment are acceptable merely because someone, somewhere believes in them (Olneck, 1990).

Some empirical studies demonstrate the lack of efficacy of multicultural programs and the fact that some school districts without minority group students do not promote the discussion of racial or ethnic differences. Moultry (1988) reports on a multicultural program that failed to produce empathy in student teachers toward issues of institutional racism. The assumption of such programs is usually that teaching students about differences is sufficient to change their beliefs and behavior. Yet after having experienced the program, these college students, soon to become teachers, lacked confidence that education could change the way people think and act relative to pluralism. The program requirements were changed so that in addition to courses on cultural differences the students must participate in field experiences that put them in contact with different cultural groups.

Anti-Racist Education and Conflict Resolution

To truly address racism, instruction must enable teachers and students to analyze the inequities in power and economic status that determine race relations. And the rising tide of racial conflict in spite of multicultural programs suggests this more direct approach is needed. In some arenas the need is being met by a concentration on anti-racist education and conflict resolution. These curricula emphasize social causes of racism over cultural ones, and consider justice the key societal objective (Brandt, 1986).

Cole (1990) offers a manual for use as a learning tool in courses, or for personal reflection about racism. The manual presents situations of racism and other biases in line drawings with captions that challenge readers to acknowledge, explore, and try to overcome personal prejudices.

Agencies such as School Mediation Associates of Cambridge, MA, and the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution in New York City, work with schools and community groups to plan, set goals, and mediate in the context of resolving conflicts that arise because of race, ethnicity, class, and gender issues within institutions. Follow-up training and support are

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provided as the school or organization forms a permanent mediation team (Governor's Task Force, 1988).

The encouragement of critical thinking about social issues such as racism is the goal of the Creative Arts Team headquartered at New York University. This organization sends teams of actors to schools and other institutions to engage audiences in participatory performances on topics such as racism and conflict resolution.

Programs such as these are changing education to promote more awareness and understanding of racism and human relations. They create learning environments that provide the opportunity for students and teachers to examine broad social perspectives in light of our multiracial society, and they sensitize students and teachers about the dangers of extremism (Governor's Task Force, 1988; Survey Research Center, 1986).

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The institutionalization of practices and procedures to combat racism requires written policy statements that are well publicized and executed throughout schools and districts. These policies are strengthened when they are aligned with multicultural, anti-racist,and conflict resolution curriculum and instruction. Among the recommendations for evaluating and reforming curricula and school policy to combat racism that appear on most experts' lists are these:

Policy Considerations

- Issue policy statements concerning race, ethnicity, religion, and gender that cover broad school district philosophy, as well as hiring practices and the handling of bias motivated incidents.
- Maintain racial and cultural diversity among members of the administration, faculty, and staff.
- Provide services for victims of bias motivated violence.
- Report and monitor trends in racial attitudes.
- Establish committees on human relations that include students, faculty, and staff.

Curriculum and Teaching

- Use the arts to encourage critical thinking about social issues.
- Check textbooks and other resources for bias.
- Reflect the cultural diversity of the school in teaching strategies.
- Affirm racial and cultural differences with regular and special activities, not only during a special time such as Black History Month and the Chinese New Year, but throughout the school year.

While the elimination of racism and racial conflict in our society will require more than simply a revision of educational policies and practices, providing students with a sound foundation for opposing bias when they are faced with it in other spheres of their lives is an important contribution.

—Vernay Mitchell

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Resources

Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith
823 United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017

Creative Arts Team
NYU, 715 Broadway, 5th floor
New York, New York 10003

The Institute for Peace and Justice
4144 Lindell Blvd. #400
St. Louis, Missouri 63108

International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution
Box 53, Teachers College, Columbia University
New York, New York 10027

Project REACH
Langston Hughes Intermediate School
11301 Ridge Heights Road
Reston, Virginia 22091

School Mediation Associates
702 Green Street #8
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

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